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ABSTRACT

A leadership development program was conducted by the home economics department of the University of Florida. The program consisted of an 11-week structured learning experience conducted by county home economics extension faculty for participants recruited from local voluntary associations in four counties. The broad objective of the program was to develop a cadre of local leaders who were able to identify and resolve issues in neighborhoods and communities. A self-report method using the focus group interview was used to collect data from the participants; 24 of 58 people who completed the course participated in the focus group interviews. Content analysis of the interview reports focused on indicators of change in the four dependent variables: (1) increase in knowledge; (2) increase in capability; (3) increase in participation and leadership in voluntary associations; and (4) increase in involvement in community affairs. The results of this study show that leadership skills, knowledge, and attitudes, acquired or reinforced through a structured learning experience, were applied by the participants to local problems and issues. (KC)

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**PERSONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH
A LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM**

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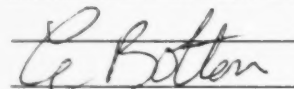
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ABSTRACT

This study reports the results of a leadership development program conducted by the Home Economics Department of the University of Florida. The program consisted of an 11 week structured learning experience conducted by county Home Economics Extension Faculty for participants recruited from local voluntary associations in four counties. The broad objective of the program was to develop a cadre of local leaders who were able to identify and resolve issues in neighborhoods and communities. A self-report method utilizing the focus group interview was used to collect data from the participants. Content analysis of the interview reports focused on indicators of change in the four dependent variables: (a) increase in knowledge, (b) increase in capability, (c) increase in participation and leadership in voluntary associations and (d) increase in involvement in community affairs. The results of this study show that leadership skills, knowledge and attitudes, acquired or reinforced through a structured learning experience, were applied by the participants to local problems and issues.

PERSONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH
A LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Background

Leadership development was one of eight major statewide Cooperative Extension programs carried out by the University of Florida Home Economics Department between 1984 and 1987. The rationale for the program lies in the mission of Cooperative Extension and the identification of national and state initiatives which provide a focus for structured county extension programs. In Florida, these national initiatives, combined with county plans of work, were developed into a state major program, Volunteer Leadership Development. The broad objective of this program was to develop a cadre of local leaders who were able to identify and resolve issues that impact individuals and communities. A three part assessment of the program was conducted; this paper reports on one aspect of that assessment, which was to evaluate the leadership structured learning experience using self reports from the participants who completed the course.

Developing the Program

Curriculum. Providing a conceptual definition of leadership was the first step in the process of transitioning from the broad objective of developing a cadre of local leaders to more specific components of leadership that would form the basis for developing

the curriculum. Leadership was defined as the contributions a person makes toward the identification and attainment of group goals. In this definition, the emphasis is given to the goals of the group rather than the individual, thus implying skill in utilizing participatory processes to achieve the aims of the majority. Within this framework, four components of leadership emerged from the literature: (a) goal identification and attainment, (b) communication skills, (c) group process skills and (d) citizen participation skills.

Specific leadership skills were identified in each component and Home Economics county faculty were asked to rank these in terms of their perceptions of importance in developing leadership skills among participants in their county. Eleven specific behaviors emerged and county faculty made suggestions for a program design that would include weekly lessons of two hours each. Using the leadership behaviors, eleven modules were developed and each contained objectives, lecture notes, handouts, visuals, group participation guides and a detailed lesson plan for a two hour session. The modules were hierarchically ordered in that each was to be taught in a given sequence during the course. Various components and materials in the modules were adapted from the Family Community Leadership (FCL) project (Oregon State University Cooperative Extension Service, 1984).

Training for county faculty. A three day inservice training was provided in 1984 for county faculty who indicated leadership development was a major program in their county. Inservice

training updates were provided in 1985, 1986 and 1987. The objective of the inservice training was to prepare county faculty to deliver leadership training to selected target audiences. Additional assistance was provided to county faculty through personal consultation and on site visits by state Extension faculty.

Target audiences. The program was designed for audiences who were determined to have the greatest potential for developing leadership skills that would be used in local public affairs. These were: (a) officers, chairmen and members of local Extension associations such as Extension Homemaker Clubs, Master Gardeners, 4-H adult volunteers and, (b) officers, chairmen, and members of local civic and service organizations not affiliated with Extension, such as Garden Clubs, Womans' Clubs, etc. Participants from these groups were recruited through local public service announcements, posters, and Extension newsletters.

Limitations. The most limiting aspect in this study is the lack of precision in collecting and analyzing data. According to Krueger (1984), the methodology of the focus group interview offers many advantages beyond the standard survey questionnaire. These include getting responses beyond those that are thought to be socially acceptable and polite, which is typical of individual responses. The disadvantage of this methodology lies in summarizing, analyzing and portraying the results for others to use. Sharing this with other readers beyond using extensive quotations becomes a very subjective process, i.e., a different

interview and evaluation may end up with similar, but different results. To overcome this limitation, the evaluator read and reread the comments several times over a period of four months to provide a consistent frame of reference that would not reflect an isolated or static perspective. To further reduce subjectivity, the evaluator provided categories that reflected perception clusters rather than opinions supported by single quotations.

The other major limitation of this study is that the population from whom the perspectives were drawn are those most likely to have positive opinions, i.e., each had completed this course and was favorably influenced to the extent that each gave up an hour to share his or her opinions. In an effort to overcome this limitation, questionnaires were mailed to participants who finished the course but did not attend the focus group interview. Another questionnaire was mailed to those participants who enrolled in the course but did not complete it. These responses did not change the overall tone of participants' perceptions.

A random sample of participants was considered as a methodology for the study but appeared to be impractical because only four counties had delivered this leadership series in a uniform way according to prescribed procedures. Many counties had used one or more leadership training modules and several had offered shorter versions of the course. Thus the participant population was small because it included only those persons who finished the designated leadership training and not those who might have had

other versions.

Given the limitations cited above, the findings of this study pertain only to the participants interviewed and cannot be generalized to other leadership development programs in Extension.

Program Assessment

Method. Procedures were designed for evaluating the program in terms of the following objectives: (a) to increase participants' knowledge of and ability to use leadership skills, (b) to increase participants' membership and leadership in community voluntary associations, and (c) to increase participants' involvement in community public affairs. To see if these objectives were attained, a self-report method utilizing the focus group interview was selected as the method to collect data from participants.

The focus group interview was chosen as the method to collect data because it is widely used in market research to determine opinion, attitudes and perceptions. It is especially useful in "providing background information as to why people think or feel the way they do" (Krueger, 1985, p.2). In addition to providing information to market researchers about product reliability, this method has been used to design and evaluate education programs. Unlike more traditional methods such as surveys, face to face interviews, and questionnaires, the focus group interview allows for group interaction and thus provides greater insight as to why certain opinions are held

(Krueger, 1985). The emphasis is on diversity of the range of opinions and not on reaching a consensus. The function of the group is to provide information and thus not to plan, vote or advise (Krueger, 1984).

Data were collected in four counties in Florida during Fall 1986. These four locations represented both rural and urban participants that had completed the leadership course under the same circumstances except that location, instructor and time of course offering was different for each county. In each location all participants who had completed the course with no more than two absences were invited to attend the focus group interview.

The responses from the four group interviews are summarized and categories are given where a general pattern emerges. Since the focus group interview is a qualitative rather than a quantitative technique, comments are excerpted from the interviews where appropriate to provide the reader with a general tone of the responses. Content analysis of the interview reports focused on indicators of change in the four dependent variables, which were: (a) increase in knowledge, (b) increase in capability, (c) increase in participation and leadership in voluntary associations, and (d) increase in involvement in community affairs. Responses to the questions and the discussions are organized into five major sections: (a) motives for enrolling in the course, (b) appropriateness of the course for Extension, (c) knowledges, attitudes and skills acquired, (d) utilization of skills and information, and (e) changes in behavior.

Participants. Twenty-four of 58 people who completed the course participated in the focus group interviews. These participants were primarily female in the age range of 35 to 70. About half of the participants were retired. The occupations of the others included volunteer coordinator, food service manager, nurse, 4-H coordinator and volunteer administrator. Most were members of community organizations which included Garden Club, Woman's Club, Eastern Star, Extension Homemakers, Master Gardeners, and 4-H. Several were members of local Extension Advisory groups.

Program Impacts

Reasons for Participating. Table 1 summarizes the responses from 24 participants who finished the course and were able to attend the focus group interview. Respondents gave 32 reasons for enrolling which clustered into six categories. The category with the highest number of responses (12) was to develop or improve skills to be used with a specific organization. The next largest category of responses (9) was for reasons concerning self-improvement. In addition to interest in organizations and self-improvement, respondents enrolled in the course gave reasons related to their work. In this third category, they saw the training as being helpful in their present or future jobs. Category four included those who saw the leadership course as a means of helping them to participate in community affairs in a general way and two enrolled so they could help others with skills they had learned.

The first four categories include 29 responses and suggest that participants had a preconceived notion of how they would use the training--the most frequent use being in a specific organization. A general desire for self-improvement and community development were the next most frequently cited reasons for enrolling in the leadership course.

One characteristic of leadership participants is that they are goal oriented learners. They indicated their needs were related to organizations to which they belonged and in which they saw a need for more general or specific leadership. Those participating for reasons related to work, community improvement or to help others are closely aligned to Houle's (1961) activity oriented individuals. While other researchers have indicated that Houle's typology tends to simplify the motives that adults have for participating in educational activities, it makes common sense (Boshier and Collins, 1985, p. 115).

Leadership development and Cooperative Extension. When asked if this is the kind of course Cooperative Extension should be offering, respondents gave a number of reasons why leadership development was appropriate for Extension to offer. Shown in Table 2 are thirty-one responses by 22 individuals that were grouped into three categories which represented the benefits respondents perceived to come from this course. The largest category of benefits perceived (13) were those accruing to the community and to local organizations. One participant observed that Extension Homemakers had been getting leadership training

through the years, "but this is offered to other people in the community and it is worthwhile to share with others what we have been learning for ourselves for a long time."

The second largest category, benefits to individuals in specific ways, had a total of 12 responses, including: (a) being able to use it daily, (b) help people take a leadership role, (c) learning to speak in public and (d) having a course without having to pay for it. The third category, helping citizens to participate in local government, could be included in either of the first two categories since it relates to helping citizens in specific ways that benefit the community. These responses were dealt with separately, however, because they reflect the purposes of the course and people saw it as appropriate for Extension to promote this involvement.

Development of new skills and attitudes. When asked what specific things they had learned during this course, 24 participants indicated they had learned eight types of specific knowledge or skills that were taught as part of the curriculum. Listening, problem solving, communication skills and conducting a meeting were skills mentioned by participants in this category. The listing in Table 3 shows the specific skills or attitudes that participants acquired during the course. Fourteen of the responses indicated eight new attitudes learned. It must be conceded that new skills or attitudes were learned by some participants but others said that the material reinforced prior learning.

Utilization of Skills and Information. Participants reported they had used a number of skills and information from the leadership course. Usage was organized into three broad categories as shown in Table 4. Working with organized groups was the largest category of utilization with 19 different responses and some respondents cited more than one way in which they had used their training. This category includes any reported application of the training with formal or informal groups or organizations such as Extension Homemakers, 4-H, Garden Clubs, etc. Twelve of the responses were categorized as aspects of the training applied to community welfare or neighborhood projects which was the second largest category of utilization. These applications ranged from conducting a town meeting to providing support for the county Extension budget at a commissioners meeting.

The third category of utilization was for the personal benefit of the individual and did not include work with organizations or for the community welfare. One respondent used this training in her work as assistant food service manager while another planned to use it to achieve her desire to be a state leader in her association. Two respondents used the problem-solving methods in resolving conflicts with members. One person reported that she had grown in self-confidence and feeling of self-worth.

Participation in New Groups and Roles. Participants were asked if they had joined any new organizations or taken any new

positions in existing organizations as a result of participating in this course. This question examined whether or not there had been an increase in organizational participation among participants and a summary of these responses is shown in Table 5. This question is based on the assumption that individuals participate in organizations that reflect their interest and that community organizations affect society where they fulfill their stated goals (Rose, 1966).

There were 12 responses indicating participants joined new organizations as a result of their participation in the leadership course and some participants had joined more than one group. The new organizations included an art alliance, museum group, county historic group, community theater, mother's group for teen sports, Eagles Forum, herb society, county fair and arthritis foundation. One participant said she had not joined but had begun to attend the Eastern Star. Others indicated they had not joined any new organizations.

Some participants said they had taken new positions in organizations to which they already belonged. These new positions included club presidency, district presidency and two vice presidencies in Extension Homemakers and a church moderator. Two noted they had taken on additional responsibilities in existing organizations. One participant noted that because of the course she was rejoining the 4-H group. Another participant plans to use the skills she learned to "get with the political scene in this city as soon as possible."

New Interest in Community Issues or Problems. Table 6 shows the results of tabulated responses to the question, "Are there community issues or problems that are of interest to you now that were not before this course?" This question sought to determine if the leadership course had broadened participants' interests in community issues or problems or promoted new interests.

Responses included seven specific needs or problems participants were currently concerned about. These included needs for: (a) a new highway in a crowded section of the county, (b) increased social services, and (c) additional volunteers. The problems of adequate water supply and trash collection were also cited as community issues that prompted new interests.

Nine responses were given which were categorized as indications of new interests. Four of these indicated an increased interest in the newspapers with particular attention to the editorial section, political figures and understanding the issues. One person said, "This course has stimulated an interest in politics and I am not ruling out the possibility of running for office." Some respondents indicated no evidence of new or broadened interest in community issues.

Changes Noted. Participants were asked what, if anything, had changed in their lives as a result of the leadership course. Several respondents indicated that more than one thing had changed in their lives. Six categories shown in Table 7 emerged from tabulating the data with 14 of the responses suggesting an improvement in skills or attitude. Specific leadership skills

that were taught in the course were mentioned. These included: to listen effectively, to present ideas more clearly, and to organize monthly association meetings. Eight responses indicated that participants had taken new roles or positions in organizations. These included a district office, president of a local Extension Homemakers club, a Sunday School group leader, president of a food service organization, Rainbow Girls Advisory Board, vice-president and president of district nurses' association. A perspective of change was given by one lady who said, "The other thing I have done that I never dreamed I would do is that I am president of an Extension Homemaker Club. I never thought I would be able to do anything like that...I was asked to be secretary of the district and any other time I would have hung up the phone and said no...I said yes...I am growing, probably slowly, but I am coming out of my shell and my lack of self-confidence is going away."

The target group of the leadership training was organizational leaders and members who could use their improved skills to be more effective in local organizations. Specific organizational improvements cited were, "meetings are handled better," "group participation is improved," "agendas and schedules are more orderly."

Resolving issues and problems is another practice adopted by some of the program's participants. One man said he had been involved in a project that involved the way the city collected trash. Becoming involved in local government was cited in four

responses which included getting involved in local voting and working at the polls. One woman organized a town meeting about a bill that her representative was presenting to the Florida legislature. A few people said that nothing was different in their lives that could be attributed to participating in the leadership course.

Discussion and Implications for Practitioners

Summary of results. The objectives of this program were met as evidenced by the self reports of the participants. They reported that they had developed or reinforced leadership skills which included listening, problem solving, and conducting a meeting. Further, they had improved their attitudes about their abilities to perform as leaders as seen by their comments on increased self-confidence. The number of community organizations to which they belonged increased and some of the participants took on new organizational roles they would not have assumed without the training they acquired in the leadership course. Participants used their leadership knowledges in working with organized groups in the community, in working on neighborhood projects as well as for their own personal benefits. They developed new interests in community issues and problems and they showed indications of new interests in and a broader awareness of the community. In citing the changes that resulted in their lives from participation in the leadership course, most noted that their individual skills had increased and several noted they wanted to become involved in

local government.

Participation in community organizations and groups has been a dominant theme in the reports from participants. They saw these organizations as the environments and settings that greatly needed skilled leaders and as places they could use the skills they learned. Reasons for enrolling in the course related directly to the desire to be more effective in a specific organization. Participants perceived the leadership course to be beneficial to the community through local organizations as evidenced by the common response that this course was appropriate for Extension to offer. More important for local organizations, participants had joined 12 new organizations and seven had taken new roles or positions in organizations to which they already belonged. They used the skills they learned to work with organized groups, and some of the participants had given presentations to their organizations.

The other dominant theme that emerged from this study is that leadership skill promotes local involvement and activity on the part of individuals. While the participants may have greatly emphasized the importance of organizations as a forum for applying their skills, it was as individuals that they were active in community issues. For example, the town meeting was organized by an individual activist, and a solution to a trash collection problem was found because an individual saw the problem and then organized others. These two participants were members of local associations, however it was as individuals that

they identified the problem and sought an equitable solution. Knowing how to approach a public official, to speak in a public setting, to prepare an agenda for a meeting are competencies that empower the individual who has them. It should also be noted that while participants attributed major community involvement efforts to their participation in the leadership course, other outcomes such as solving personal problems with merchants and neighbors may have happened regardless of the participation in the course.

Use of the leadership skills by the individual participants is an important aspect of the outcomes of this program. According to Wilkinson (1987), many leadership programs have little to do with problems that face the local community but rather are concerned with interpersonal or analytical skills. He adds that many times leadership education programs do more for the individual than the community unless the community problems are included in the focus of the educational programs. It is clear that the participants in this leadership education series did benefit as individuals. However, it is also evident from the examples of the town meeting, the trash collection committee, and other instances of working with community welfare and neighborhood projects, that the community also benefited from the skills that these participants learned.

While this study was limited to the assessment of an Extension leadership development program in four selected locations, the findings have implications on a broader scale.

Most importantly, this study has shown that leadership skills, knowledges and attitudes, acquired or reinforced through a structured learning experience, were applied by the participants to local problems and issues. Adults participated in the leadership class for specific purposes that were for individual as well as organizational goals, and while the results of the program were important to the individual participants, they also impacted the larger community or had the potential for doing so in the near future.

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the Southern Rural Development Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

Table 1

Reasons for Enrolling

Responses	No.*
Improve a specific organization or group	12
Self improve	9
Employment or work related	5
Become involved in community	3
Help others	2
Social	1
Total**	32

* Number of responses in a given category.

** Number of responses does not sum to number of respondents because respondents may have reported more than one observation.

Table 2

Reasons given for Extension to Offer Leadership Development Course

Responses	No.*
Benefits community and local organizations	13
Benefits individuals in specific ways	12
Helps citizens to participate in local government	4
Benefits the Extension Service	2
Total**	31

* Refers to number of responses in a given category

** Number of responses does not sum to number of respondents because respondents may have reported more than one observation.

Table 3

Knowledges, Attitudes and Skills Acquired

<u>Knowledges and Skills</u>	No.*
Listening	7
Problem solving	6
Conducting a Meeting	4
Communication skills	6
Conflict resolution	2
Parliamentary procedure	2
Evaluation	2
Knowledge of legislature and local government	<u>1</u>
	30
 <u>Attitudes</u>	
Self-confidence and trust	5
Projecting a good attitude	1
See other points of view	1
Participate better	2
Everyone can be a leader	1
Leaders are also members	1
To be a good member	1
Not to be annoyed at little things	<u>2</u>
	14
 <u>Nothing new</u>	
Reinforced what I already knew	4
Can't remember or nothing new learned	<u>2</u>
	6
 Total**	 <u>50</u>

* Refers to number of responses in a given category.

** Number of responses does not sum to number of respondents because respondents may have reported more than one observation.

Table 4
Utilization of Skills and Information

Working with organized groups N=18*

Encourage sharing in group
 Doing committee work
 Share information with club members
 Used skills in Women's club work
 As president of district nurses association
 As a delegate to nurses convention
 Used information with 4-H club
 In Eastern Star
 In Rainbow Girls
 To work on bylaws for District Extension Homemakers
 Evaluate club meetings
 Used problem solving process in planning programs
 Used leadership modules with 4-H
 To conduct effective meetings
 To organize group
 To provide guidance to tropical fruit club
 Change bylaws of organization
 EFNEP neighborhood and club meeting in Extension Homemakers

Working for community welfare or neighborhood projects N=12*

Clarified issues by organizing town meeting
 State organization becomes involved in community affairs
 Doing legislative lobbying in Tallahassee
 Member of steering committee of Museum Park complex
 Chairman of museum associates
 Lobby for the library
 Conducted group work with public agencies
 Spoke up for social services at county commissioners
 Preparing reports for homeowners meeting to influence vote
 on issues
 Formed a committee to deal with improper waste disposal
 included county and city officials
 Give support to budget at county commission meeting
 Got lights put up in our neighborhood

For personal benefit N=10*

Plan to be a state leader
 With food service job as assistant manager
 Solving a problem with a store manager
 Solved a problem of paper delivery
 Wrote my representative
 More effective in my work
 To get prepared
 To think through issues
 To be unafraid to speak up
 To have self-confidence

Total N=40**

*Refers to number of responses in a given category. **Number of responses does not sum to number of respondents because respondents may have reported more than one observation.

Table 5

Increase in Organizations Joined and Leadership Roles

Participation in New Groups N=12*

Art alliance
 Museum Group
 Historical Society
 Community Theatre
 Eastern Star
 Mother's group for teen sports
 Eagle's forum
 Arthritis Foundation
 County Fair
 Herb society
 Local politics (2)

New Positions Assumed N=7*

President of Extension Homemaker Club (2)
 New responsibilities in existing org.
 Vice President, District II, E.H.
 Church group moderator
 Vice President, District IV, E.H.
 President District V, E.H.

Total N = 19**

* Refers to number of repsonses in a given category. **Number of responses does not sum to number of respondents because respondents may have reported more than one observation.

Table 6

New Interests in Community Issues and Problems

Issues and Problems N=7*

need for volunteers

water problems

trash problems

neighborhood condition

need for spoken English

need for social services

need for new highway

Indications for New Interest N=9*

read newspaper more (2)

read editorial section of newspaper

read newspaper to study political figures

analyze current conditions

club involvement in community affairs

awareness of larger community

gives more thought to issues

consideration of political office

Total N=16**

* This refers to number of responses in a given category.

**Number of responses does not sum to number of respondents.

Table 7

Changes Resulting from Leadership Course Participation.

Categories of Change Cited	No.*
Improved individual skills or attitudes	14
Assumed new organizational roles	8
Organizations were improved	8
Became involved in local government	4
Resolved issues or problem	4
Nothing	2
Total citations**	40

* Refers to number of reponses in a given category.

** Number of responses does not sum to number of respondents because respondents may have reported more than one observation.